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ABSTRACT

An analysis of voting behavior toward women candidates in the 1979 general election in Great Britain determined whether public opinion has shifted against an equal political role for women. A total of 104 Labour, Liberal, and Conservative female candidates were measured against a control group of the same number of male candidates. The research compared the percentage of the 1979 vote received by the party of the female candidate to the percentage the party received in 1974. Variables in addition to gender were incumbency, party label, previous party strength, and region. Although a variety of analytical techniques were performed on the data, results indicated that the gender of the candidate had no significant impact upon electoral success. British voters tend to vote along party lines and currently women are candidates in constituencies where their party has not previously fared well. Incumbency is of limited importance to males and even less so for females. Thus, the reason for the lack of female politicians does not lie with the electorate. The only way to increase the proportion of women in the House of Commons is for their parties to place them in constituencies where the parties have done well in the past. (KC)

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THE ELECTORAL COSTS OF BEING A WOMAN IN THE 1979 BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION

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SP 014 331

I wish to thank the Iowa State University Computation Center for the computer time necessary to perform the statistical calculations involved in this research.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (Denver, CO, September 2, 1982).

THE ELECTORAL COSTS OF BEING A WOMAN IN THE

1979 BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION

In opinion polls in the 1950s and 1960s the overwhelming majority of the British electorate claimed that they did not object to voting for a woman candidate for the House of Commons, that they would vote for the party they normally supported regardless of the candidate's gender.[1] A poll conducted during the 1979 General Election, however, found that four times as many respondents (44 percent to 11) admitted preferring a man to a woman as MP, although two-fifths said it made no difference to them.[2] Apparently, either public attitudes in Britain have shifted against an equal political role for women or respondents have become more honest in their replies than they used to be.

Although the Conservatives' 1979 victory made Britain the first Western nation to have its government headed by a woman, women hardly have made significant political gains in Britain. In 1979 the number of women elected to the House of Commons dropped to the lowest it had been in 28 years. Furthermore, the number of women MPs was only four greater than it had been in 1931. Slightly more than a year before the 1979 election only 59 percent of the <u>women</u> polled said they would like to see a woman as Prime Minister, while 31 percent said they would not.[3]

The views which the electorate expresses do not seem to be consistent. Furthermore, one may wonder how truthful survey respondents are in replying to a question that deals with basic values and may raise some emotions; do British voters really behave at the polling station on this matter as they tell a pollster they will?[4] Thus it is necessary to turn

from what the British electorate says it does to examine what it actually does do.

The role of women in British national elections, especially as candidates rather than as voters, has received only limited attention. The coverage given them in the 1979 Nuffield study is not atypical.[5] The index to this book includes only a single one-page citation to women candidates; the 41-page appendix by John Curtice and Michael Steed, which analyzes in detail the results of the 1979 election, says not one word about women candidates. A few studies attempt to assess the electoral impact of women candidates but these tend, for the most part, to be one variable analyses.[6] The results achieved by women candidates tend to be attributed explicitly or implicitly to gender; there is little attempt to assess the impact of gender relative to other important variables. Thus the findings usually cannot go much beyond the conclusion that gender makes some difference, but whether that difference is of real significance in the electoral process is unclear. Research thus far has not been sufficient to indicate whether the well-known aspect of British politics that the individual candidate can mobilize only a handful of votes on a personal basis must be set aside when gender is a consideration. This current study seeks to explore the role of gender in the 1979 General Election in such a way as to ascertain its relative importance.

Since the number of women candidates offered by the main parties for the House of Commons continues to be low, all women standing for the Labour, Liberal, and Conservative parties in the 1979 General Election were selected for this study. In order to obtain clear-cut evidence of the effect of a woman candidate upon electoral behavior, all constituencies (and their

candidates) where two or more women stood (for whatever party or as independents) were eliminated. This procedure eliminated 29 of the women who stood for the main parties in 1979. In addition one Liberal woman candidate had to be eliminated since the Liberals had not contested in the previous election in October 1974 the constituency for which she stood in 1979; thus no basis for ascertaining her impact comparable to that used for the other candidates was available. This procedure selected 104 women--43 Labour, 41 Liberal, and 20 Conservative.[7] This group should be considered a population, not a sample, since it included all women candidates who met the selection criteria.[8]

In choosing a sample of male candidates to serve as a control group or basis for comparison, it was decided not to select randomly, but to endeavor to match male candidates to each woman in order to gain a sample which would differ from the women primarily on sex. Such a matched sample would seem to be the best way of isolating any impact that gender had upon the electorate.[9]

The procedure was to ascertain the share of the vote the party for which the woman stood in 1979 had received in October 1974. Then a search was made of the constituencies adjoining the ones where each of the 104 women stood in 1979. Any adjoining constituency where a woman had stood in either October 1974 or 1979 was eliminated. From the remaining adjoining constituencies that constituency was chosen in each case where the vote received by each woman's party in October 1974 most nearly resembled what it had received in that same election in the constituency for which the woman subsequently stood in 1979. In other words, the object was to find two adjoining constituencies where a party did about

equally well in October 1974 with one member of each pair being a constituency contested by a woman for that party in 1979. Once the constituency had been selected in this fashion, the male candidate of the appropriate party in 1979 was selected. This produced a matched sample of 104 male candidates from the 1979 election.[10]

Since a large number of variables tends to inflate statistical measures of association, this study did not attempt a comprehensive identification of variables involved in electoral choice, but concentrated on a few that seemed likely to be of considerable influence and which could provide a basis for ascertaining the relative impact of gender. The other variables chosen in addition to gender were incumbency, party label, previous party strength, and region.

For each of the 104 women and 104 men included in this study the percentage of the vote which they personally received in 1979 is the dependent variable. The vote obtained by their party in that constituency in October 1974 is one of the independent variables. In some instances the 1979 candidate was the one who also obtained the 1974 vote, but in most cases the earlier vote was cast for a different candidate of the same party.

Although voter preferences have tended to fluctuate more widely recently in Britain than in the past, still they do not do so wildly. Furthermore, the idea behind the Nuffield studies' swing concept is that the fluctuations which do occur from one election to the next occur within a relatively narrow band and tend, generally, to be fairly uniform throughout the country. Thus a considerable association can be expected between what a party receives in one election and what it receives in the following election.

While there is good reason to think that a party's vote in two

successive elections will be related, yet in this particular case the linkage may be muted. While Labour was the leading party in 1974, from 1974 to 1979 the electoral movement was against Labour and toward the Conservatives. This movement would attenuate the association, which would be likely to be closer if the party which polled best nationally at the first election increased its strength further at the second one. That is to say that the relation between vote in the two elections would be likely to be stronger if the pair were 1964 and 1966 (totally apart from the shorter intervening period) than when they are October 1974 and 1979, since in the mid-1960s Labour in the second election strengthened the slight lead which it had obtained in the first election.

On the other hand, any possible muting of the relation in this stud is lessened by the fact that only about one-fifth of the candidates included were Conservatives. The Conservatives are not under-represented--they simply do not offer as many women candidates as do either the Liberals or Labour (or, for that matter, as did the National Front in 1979). And since the male candidates included in this study are a matched sample, Conservatives among them must number exactly the same as among the female candidate population. This partisan imbalance is unfortunate, but accurately reflects the political realities for British women.

Little needs to be said about the well-known tendency of the British electorate to vote according to party label. Granted that party loyalty is declining in Britain and that some evidence indicates that those who remain loyal to their party increasingly tend to do so for instrumental reasons--a conscious judgement that the policy output it produces when in power is best for them--rather than symbolic reasons or without thinking,

yet party still plays a major role in electoral choice and must be included in this study.

To ascertain the impact of party upon electoral behavior in 1979, two dummy independent variables were created, one for the Labour party and one for the Conservatives. Thus the reference category is the Liberals, so assigned because as the weakest of the three main parties, their party label would seem likely to have the least impact. This approach permits ascertaining what advantage a candidate gained by standing for one of the principal parties and should facilitate interpretation of the restults.

Given past voter loyalty to party and class-motivated voting, the prevailing view has been that individual candidates normally are worth little more than a few hundred votes personally. Exceptions to this rule are not uncommon, however, and seem likely to be more prevalent in a period of party dealignment. Attempting to rate candidates for personal charisma or local prominence involves too many subjective judgements. One personal factor can be specified with ease, however, and seems likely to have some electoral impact--incumbency. All things being equal, one would assume that an incumbent would be better known to the voters than other candidates would be. Certainly an incumbent would have had some opportunity to serve his or her constituency and thus to develop some fund of gratitutde. On the other hand, in a period of political alienation being the incumbent might be more of a burden than an asset. In any event some impact upon voter behavior could be expected.

Incumbency also is a dummy independent variable with non-incumbency being the reference category. Such a coding will indicate what value, if

any, an incumbent had in contesting the 1979 election.[11]

As noted above, in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain region was not thought to be of political significance. Increasingly in the 1970s, in part, but not only, because of the rise of separatist nationalism, evidence rapidly accumulated that locality had some impact on British politics. This was strikingly true of the 1979 election--for the first time in post-World War II British elections the graphing of individual constituencies according to swing came "close to a bimodal distribution with Southern British and Northern British peaks."[12] The Nuffield study found it necessary to calculate two regional swing figures in addition to the national one. In the south the average movement to the Conservatives was 7.7 percentage points, while in the north it had been only 4.2.

Therefore, this study includes region as a dummy independent variable. South is the variable and north the reference category, since, as the figures above indicate, the effect of region was to magnify the swing to the Conservatives in the south and retard it in the north.[13]

Gender is the remaining independent variable. Male is made the dummy variable and female the reference category. Such coding will reveal the advantage which a man's gender by itself had upon candidature.

For the first analysis two multiple regressions--one for the male sample and one for the female population--were calculated using the five independent variables just discussed. The results appear in Table 1.

All the slopes (b) for the male candidates equation are significant at the .01 level.[14] That is to say that the confidence interval ($b \pm$ the standard error of b times a t of 2.6) does not in any instance include zero.[15] This means that there is a 99 percent probability that the value

of the slopes for the population of all male candidates in 1979 lies within the various confidence limits and differs from zero. Similarly, the t ratio for each slope surpasses 2.6, the required figure for the .01 level.[16] To this extent the sample of male candidates used in this study, although having been systematically selected, satisfactorily represents male candidates generally and provides an adequate basis of comparison with female candidates. Since, as explained above, the women candidates included in this study are a population, not a sample, testing the slopes in their equation for significance is not necessary.

The striking aspect of Table 1 is how small the differences are between the sexes. The five variable model can be used to predict the 1979 share of the vote with equal confidence for men and women. For example, if in a given case the equation were to predict that a candidate of either sex would receive 40 percent of the vote in 1979 the probability would be 95 percent that the share actually received was somewhere between just over 33 percent to somewhere just under 47 percent (predicted value $\pm$ two standard errors). While this hardly is a very specific prediction, the five variable model should not be undervalued--in the case of either men or women the model is able to explain virtually all--95 percent--of the variance in 1979 vote.

Although the differences between the two equations are slight, they are informative. The relative impact of a party's 1974 electoral strength in a given constituency upon its candidate's success in the 1979 election is somewhat greater for women than for men. That is to say that a woman is somewhat more a prisoner of past results, is less able to have a personal impact on the electorate than is a man. This interpretation

Table 1

Predictors of 1979 Vote for Male and Female Candidates

	beta		b		std. error b	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
1974 Vote	.75	.79	.84	.85	.04	.04
Conservative	.36	.36	13.41	12.95	.99	1.03
Labour	.14	.15	4.08	4.43	.95	.94
incumbent	.11	.06	4.71	2.59	1.36	1.31
south	.06	.09	-1.86	-2.51	.70	.74

	M	F
constant	-0.87	-0.45
R^2	.95	.94
standard error	3.36	3.52

gains support from the main contrast between the two equations, the different contributions of incumbency. While being an incumbent does not help a man a great deal--as noted above, a candidate's personal vote in Britain has tended to be limited--for a woman incumbency is worth even less. The beta weights in Table 1 indicate that incumbency's impact relative to the other variables was nearly twice as great for men as for women.[17]

Perhaps the clearest way of seeing the differences is to interpret the slopes. For men being an incumbent in the 1979 elections was worth, on average, nearly five percentage points (4.71) in the share of the vote that they received compared to that obtained by the average non-incumbent. For women incumbency added two and a half percentage points, on average, to their share of the vote in 1979.[18] For women incumbency was about of the same importance as whether they were a candidate in the north or south--those standing in the south obtaining, on average, about two and a half percentage points less than did those in the north, when they did not differ on any of the other variables included in the equation.[19]

The impact of party label varied little by gender. The average woman candidate standing for the Conservatives received nearly 13 percentage points more than she would have had she stood for the Liberals. For the average male Conservative candidate the gain was more than 13 percentage points. On the other hand, the Labour Party label was slightly more helpful to women than it was to men.

The small size of the slope for 1974 vote may make it appear to be of little importance and may raise a question of how it can have a beta weight more than twice as great of any other variable. The reason is that 1974 vote, unlike the other variables, is not a dummy variable. In the

case of the dummy variables the slopes indicate the difference in percentage points for being in either the variable group or the reference category group. For these variables the slopes in effect are additive rather than multiplicative. Since 1974 vote is an interval variable, it serves as a multiplier. Thus the equations indicate that when party, region, and incumbency are partialled out, the vote which a candidate received in 1979--regardless of whether the candidate was male or female--was about five-sixths of what the party had received in that constituency in October 1974. Even the average 13 percentage points gained by Conservative candidates would be likely to be more in the vicinity of only a third of the vote in the previous election.

The separate equations reveal a difference in the rank order of impact of the two least important variables and this reversal helps to suggest how little aid incumbency is for a woman candidate. Other than this, however, the differences are inconsequential; the impact of key variables upon electoral fortunes in 1979 does not appear to have been affected by the gender of the candidate.

Such a conclusion can be examined more directly through a regression equation that adds gender to the variables included thus far and which combines the male sample and the female population into a single group. The results of this regression appear in Table 2.

Given the similiarity between the figures for the two equations discussed previously, Table 2 is no surprise for the first five variables. Although region was more important for women candidates than was incumbency, the difference was not sufficiently great to reverse the rank order of variables for male candidates when the regression is calculated for a

Table 2

Predictors of 1979 Vote for Male and Female Candidates Combined

	beta	b	std. error b
1974 Vote	.77	.84	.03
Conservative	.36	13.19	.71
Labour	.15	4.22	.66
incumbent	.09	3.69	.93
south	.07	-2.15	.51
male	.00	.05	.48

constant	-0.72
R^2	.94
standard error	3.42

combined group.

The striking figures in Table 2, of course, are for male. Gender is of no importance whatsoever relative to the other variables--the typical male candidate gained only a twentieth of a percentage point more on average than did the typical female candidate when the effect of the other variables in the equation is controlled.

To this point the relative impact of the variables has been assessed. While this is useful, it says nothing about their absolute explanatory power. Therefore, their separate contributions to explaining the variance in the vote received in 1979 needs to be ascertained. The total variance can be decomposed in two ways--the standard method and the hierarchical method.[20] The first method utilizes the squared part (not to be confused with partial) correlation between an independent variable and the dependent variable to assess the additional contribution made to explaining the variance when the independent variable is added to an equation already containing all the other independent variables. This procedure identifies the unique, direct contribution of each independent variable.[21] But precisely because it does, these contributions will not sum to the total variance explained by the equation. Unattributed to any independent variable will be that portion of the explained variance due to the joint effect of the independent variables.

The hierarchical method enters the variables into the equation according to a specified logical sequencing of their effects. In this procedure all of the change in R^2 at each step is attributed to the independent variable entered at that point. As a result the separate contributions do sum to the total variance explained. The contributions identified by the

hierarchical method are the total influence--the indirect, as well as the direct--of each independent variable.

For this study the two party variables were entered first, since they obviously would be likely to affect the 1974 vote as well as the 1979 vote. Then the 1974 vote was entered. Finally incumbency and region were entered.[22] While region conceivably could have affected the 1974 vote, it was not until the 1979 election, as noted above, that its impact was especially pronounced. While incumbency could be a factor in any election, the candidates included in this study were classified as incumbents or non-incumbents on the basis of membership in the House of Commons at the time of 1979 election, not for the previous election.

The results of applying both methods to male candidates and female candidates separately appear in Table 3. The figures appearing in the total column were obtained from using the hierarchical method and those in the direct column from the standard method. The figures in the indirect column were obtained by subtracting the direct column from the total column.

Given the discussion thus far concerning the relative impact of the variables in the equations for each of the two groups of candidates, the great similarity of the figures in the total column is only to be expected. The principal difference which the table reveals is in the contrasting effects of the 1974 vote between male and female candidates. For men most of the effect of the 1974 vote occurs indirectly. Nonetheless, the indirect effects are no greater than are those of the Conservative party label; 1974 vote has the greater overall impact only because its direct effects are twice as great. For women the indirect effects of the 1974 vote are smaller than are those of Conservative party label, and differ little from the

Table 3

Decomposition of Total Variance Explained in 1979 Vote

female candidates

	direct	indirect	total
Labour	.013	.145	.158
Conservative	.095	.234	.329
1974 Vote	.282	.162	.444
south	.007	.001	.008
incumbent	.002	.000	.002
	.399	.542	.941

male candidates

	direct	indirect	total
Labour	.009	.169	.178
Conservative	.094	.241	.335
1974 vote	.186	.240	.426
incumbent	.006	.001	.007
south	.004	.000	.004
	.299	.651	.950

indirect effects of standing as a Labour candidate. The 1974 vote is the variable which for women candidates explains the largest share of the variation in the 1979 vote only because its direct effects are three times as great as are those of Conservative party label.

Thus how a candidate's party had fared in a given constituency in 1974 had as much impact upon the vote gained in 1979 by a female candidate as it did upon that obtained by a male candidate. In the case of the woman, however, the effect was primarily straightforward, while in the case of a man it was a more complex relation mainly mediated by intervening variables. This is to say that in the case of male candidates other factors were more likely to come into play than in the case of female candidates. The electoral fortunes of women tend to be more directly affected by the past performance of their party; compensating or off-setting factors which might help them overcome being adopted for an unpromising seat are less likely to operate than in the case of male candidates.

Given the same sizes and statistical similarities between the two groups of candidates presenting the results of the two approaches to variance decomposition for the entire combined group is unnecessary (a close approximation can be obtained by averaging the two sets of figures from each half of Table 3). The only point to be noted is that in the equation for the combined group, sex is included as a dummy variable in order to obtain a direct indication of its impact upon electoral choice. Not surprisingly, given the figures in Table 2, sex explains <u>none</u> of the variance--either directly or indirectly--in the 1979 vote.[23] Thus again it appears that while the variables affecting electoral choice in 1979 did interact somewhat differently in those cases where the candidate was a woman than

they did where the candidate was a man, yet gender as such had little impact on electoral choice.

While the information in Table 3 has advanced the analysis a step further, the nature of the linkage between the variables remains somewhat imprecise. Useful as regression analysis is, Blalock has observed, "since we have not specified the causal connections among the independent variables themselves..., we cannot say anything about the total impact of each variable. For example, if the first independent variable is a cause of the second, then a change in this first variable would also produce a change in the second, so that there could be a direct as well as an indirect effect. Thus we cannot assess the relative importance of each variable unless we know more about the causal structure of the total system."[24] Table 3 has met this point only in part. Furthermore, Franklin and Mughan amply have demonstrated how greatly one's interpretation of the determinants of electoral choice in Britain can be influenced by the analytical technique employed in a study.[25] Thus the analysis turns next to causal modeling.

The logic of linking the variables included in this study in a causal model needs to be explicated. Party--Conservative and Labour--and region--specifically, candidacy in the south--are exogenous variables. A candidate's party affiliation obviously will affect the vote received in both 1974 and 1979. Conservative and Labour labels obviously will be inversely related, but not perfectly because both the male sample and the female population analyzed in this study included Liberal candidates as well. No path linking region with either Conservative or Labour is required because both parties contest elections on a national basis. As pointed out previously, the effect of regionalism in the form of contrasting electoral fortunes

between the Labour and Conservative parties in the north or south was most pronounced in the 1979 election. Nonetheless, the model should allow for the possibility of an effect in 1974, rather than rule it out entirely.

The 1974 vote and incumbency are endogenous variables, the first being affected directly by the three exogenous variables. The linkage between the 1974 vote and the dependent variable--the 1979 vote--seems likely to be both direct and indirect, both logically and in the light of the figures in Table 3. Clearly the vote which one received in 1974 will be a major influence upon whether one entered the 1979 campaign as an incumbent. Furthermore, incumbency might serve to enhance the impact of previous election results upon subsequent ones. That is to say that a good previous result may be even more of an aid to a candidate in the next election if that good previous result was sufficient to have won.

Figure 1 presents the linkages just discussed along with the path coefficients for women candidates.[26] Table 4 uses these coefficients to estimate the correlations between the variables and to compare these with the actual correlations, thereby testing the adequacy of the causal model.[27] Finally, Table 5 decomposes the effects of the variables into their three components on the basis of the causal model.[28]

Figure 1 also indicates the residual (R) or error terms--factors not measured in the model which affect the endogenous variables. The high values for 1974 vote and incumbency are not a major concern since they indicate only that factors unaccounted for play the major role in the variation of these two variables. The focus of this study, however, is not on either of these variables, but upon variation in the 1979 vote. Here the coefficient for the R term is much lower, indicating that factors not

Figure 1

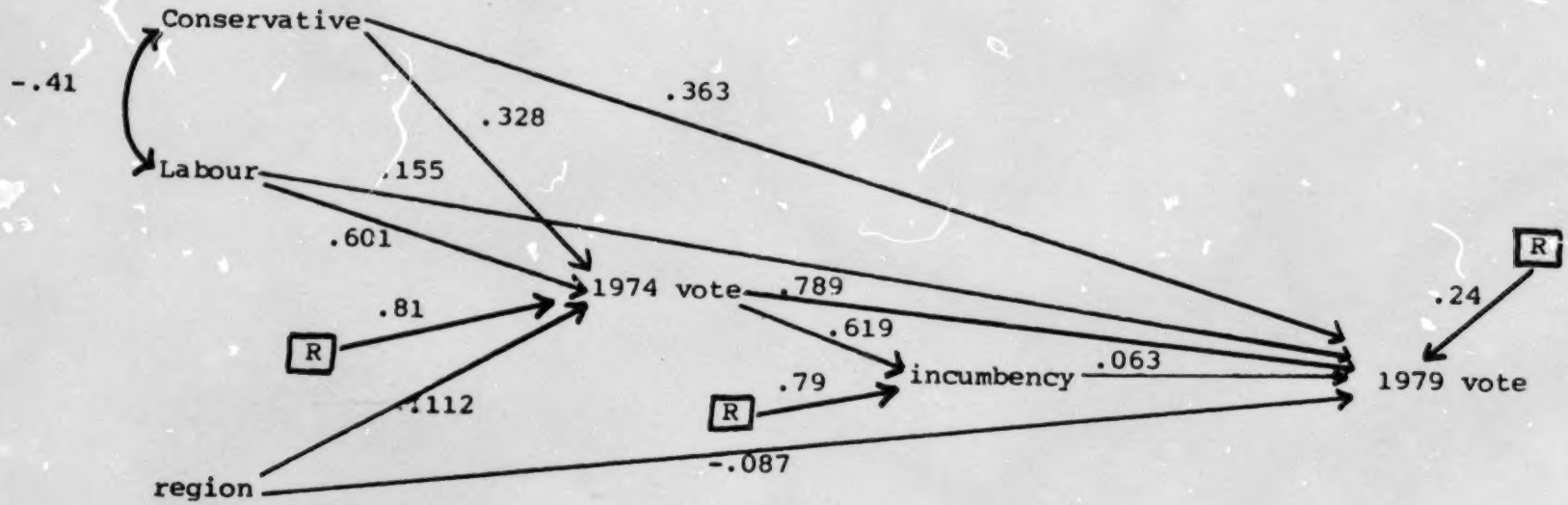
Conservative
-.41
Labour
.363
.328
.155
.601
1974 vote
.789
.81
R
.619
incumbency
.063
1979 vote
.24
R
.79
R
.112
region
-.087

Table 4

Actual and Estimated Correlations for Women Candidates' Model

	Con	Lab	region	1974	incum	1979
Con				.069		.360
Lab				.491		.397
region				.208		.071
1974	.082	.467	.112		.619	.911
incum				.619		.586
1979	.367	.392	.005	.920	.609	

Table 5

Decomposition of Effects for Women Candidates' Model

	direct	indirect	spurious	total
Conservative	.363	.004	----	.367
Labour	.155	.237	----	.392
region	-.087	.092	----	.005
1974 vote	.789	.039	.092	.920
incumbency	.063	----	.546	.609

included in the model play only a minor role in explaining the variation in the 1979 vote.

Table 4 further supports the conclusion that the model has been properly specified. The values which appear above the diagonal are the actual zero-order correlations between the variables; the values below the diagonal are correlations estimated from the path coefficients in Figure 1, tracing all permissable paths.[29] As can be seen, in almost all instances the differences between the two values are slight.

The large spurious effects for incumbency in Table 5 might seem to raise a question whether the linkages indicated for this variable in Figure 1 are adequate. In this context spurious means "compound paths that are mathematically part of the decomposition, but are not substantively interpretable."[30] In the case of incumbency several paths can be traced, without violating Wright's rules, which run against the causal flow of the paths. A single one of these paths, however, accounts for nine-tenths of the spurious effects--incumbency to 1974 vote to 1979 vote. This is quite understandable--incumbency certainly could be expected to effect the 1974 vote as well as the 1979 vote. As noted previously, the candidates included in this study were coded for incumbency on the basis of their status at the start of the 1979 campaign. Thus this particular incumbency variable could not appear in the causal model as an effect upon 1974 vote. In reality, of course, most of those candidates who were incumbents in 1979 also were incumbents in 1974. Thus a linkage with the earlier election is understandable. In fact the value of incumbency for such candidates may have been gained already for the most part--this would help to explain the considerably greater path coefficient between the 1974 vote and

incumbency than between incumbency and the 1979 vote. The point is that the problem cannot be dealt with without introducing a second incumbency variable based on status at the time of the 1974 election, which would complicate the model beyond any gain for eliminating the "spurious" aspect of the model as it stands.

Before the results of the path analysis can be discussed further usefully, the corresponding figure and tables for male candidates need to be presented. The previous comments made about the size of the error terms in Figure 1, the close correspondence of the two sets of correlations in Table 4, and the size of spurious effects in Table 5, apply as well to Figure 2 and Tables 6 and 7.

As has been the case in the analysis to this point, the most immediately striking aspect of these figures and tables is their great similarity. Nonetheless, the differences which do exist are interesting. The impact of the 1974 vote is the same for both male and female candidates, but in slightly different ways. The previous vote affects the subsequent results a bit more directly in the case of women than men. The total effect turns out to be the same, regardless of gender, because the indirect linkage between the two elections through incumbency is greater for men than for women. For women incumbency is a bit less dependent upon the 1974 vote than it is for men and the direct effect of incumbency upon the 1979 vote is smaller. Thus the causal model helps to confirm the earlier conclusion that women have a somewhat more difficult time overcoming adoption in an unpromising seat than do men.

For both men and women the effect of the Conservative party label is almost entirely direct, while the effect of Labour is more indirect than

Figure 2

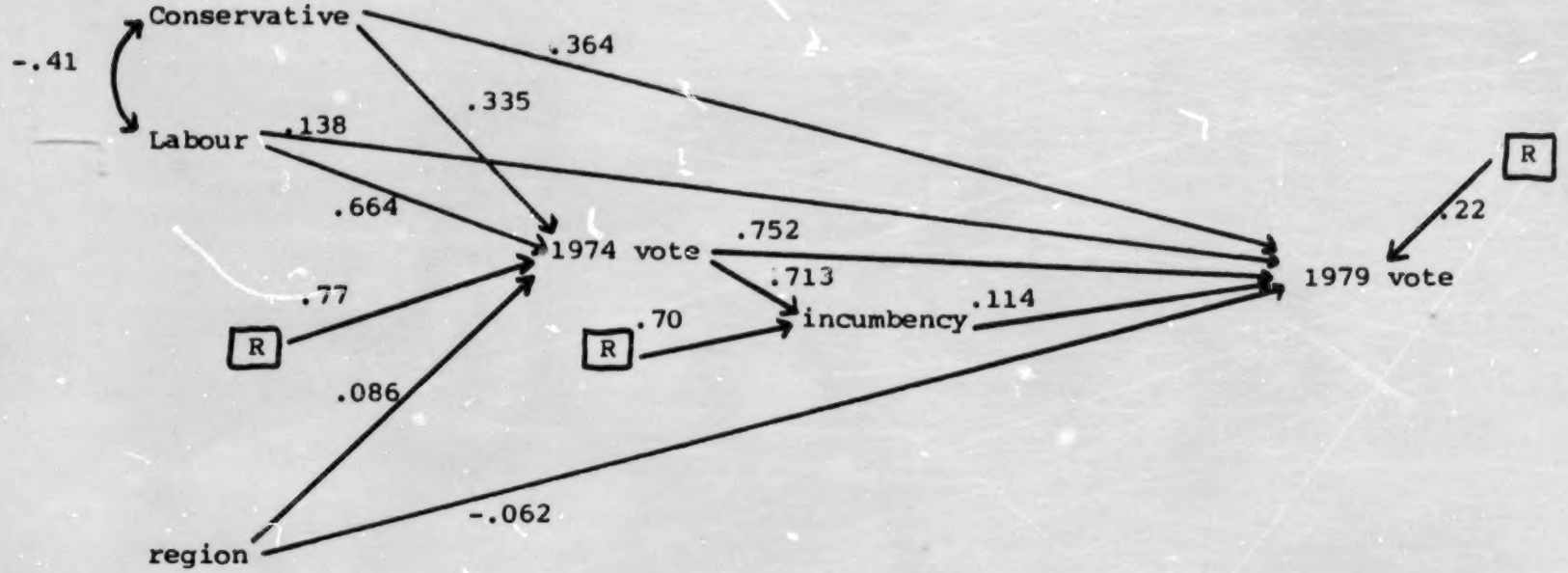
Conservative
-.41
Labour
.364
.335
.138
.664
1974 vote
.752
.713
1979 vote
R
.22
.77
R
.70
R
incumbency
.114
.086
-.062
region

Table 6

Actual and Estimated Correlations for Men Candidates' Model

	Con	Lab	region	1974	incum	1979
Con				.053		.355
Lab				.545		.422
region				.195		.084
1974	.063	.527	.086		.713	.916
incum				.713		.691
1979	.359	.428	.010	.924	.713	

Table 7

Decomposition of Effects for Men Candidates' Model

	direct	indirect	spurious	total
Conservative	.364	-.005	----	.359
Labour	.138	.290	----	.428
region	-.062	.072	----	.010
1974 vote	.752	.081	.091	.924
incumbency	.114	----	.599	.713

direct.[31] While Labour outpolled the Conservatives in 1974, the lead was small; in 1979 the vote swung sharply against Labour. Thus one would expect the relation between the two parties and the two elections to vary as they do. The interesting point is that the path from Conservative to 1979 vote is the same for men as for women. Previous research has suggested that women candidates get some benefit from their party's electoral successes, that "women MPs tend to come in with the party winning a general election and go out with the party losing it."[32] While that conclusion may be true applied simply to numbers of women elected to the Commons, Figures 1 and 2 indicate that Conservative women did not derive some bonus from their party's electoral good fortune in 1979. The connection between party and 1979 vote is no stronger for women than for men.[33] While the linkage between party label and vote was less strong in 1974, when the Conservatives did not poll as well, it was no different for women than for men.

In the case of the Labour party this is a bit less true. Men appear to have benefited more than women from the better 1974 result--the path between Labour and 1974 vote shows a larger coefficient for men in Figure 2. While this is contrary to what previous research had suggested, the path coefficients for Labour and 1979 vote give slight support to previous research. Women do appear to have been affected more than were men by Labour's adverse 1979 vote--the Figure 1 coefficient is higher, although the difference is rather slight.

The small coefficient for both men and women between region and 1979 vote would appear at first glance to conflict with the Nuffield finding of distinct regional swings. The coefficient should be interpreted, however, in conjunction with the one for the path from region to 1974 vote.

Contrasting electoral behavior between the north and the south in 1979 was sufficient to turn a small positive linkage in 1974 to a slight negative one in 1979. The magnitude of the total shift does not seem out of line with the Nuffield finding of a difference of three and a half percentage points in regional swings. The differences between the regional path coefficients in the causal model for men and the one for women are too slight to draw any conclusion from the fact that in each instance the effect was greater for women candidates.

The results obtained when both groups of candidates are combined and gender is introduced as an endogenous variable appear in Tables 8 and 9 and Figure 3. The comments made about the magnitude of the error factors and the close correspondence between the estimated and the actual correlations for the models discussed previously are applicable here also. And as before, about nine-tenths of the spurious effects for incumbency are accounted for by the path that runs back through the 1974 vote. Similarly, about four-fifths of the spurious effects for sex are attributal to such a link. As explained previously for incumbency correcting this would require introducing a gender variable for the 1974 vote as well as for the 1979 vote and would complicate, more than clarify, the model.

In the context of this analysis the most interesting aspect of these results is the miniscule impact of gender. Not only does gender have virtually no impact upon the 1979 vote, it is not even a significant mediator for the effect of the 1974 vote. While the great bulk of the effect of the 1974 vote is direct, it also has some limited indirect effect. All of this is through incumbency; the path through sex is so tiny as to be non-existent. Thus these results further confirm the conclusion drawn from the previous

Figure 3

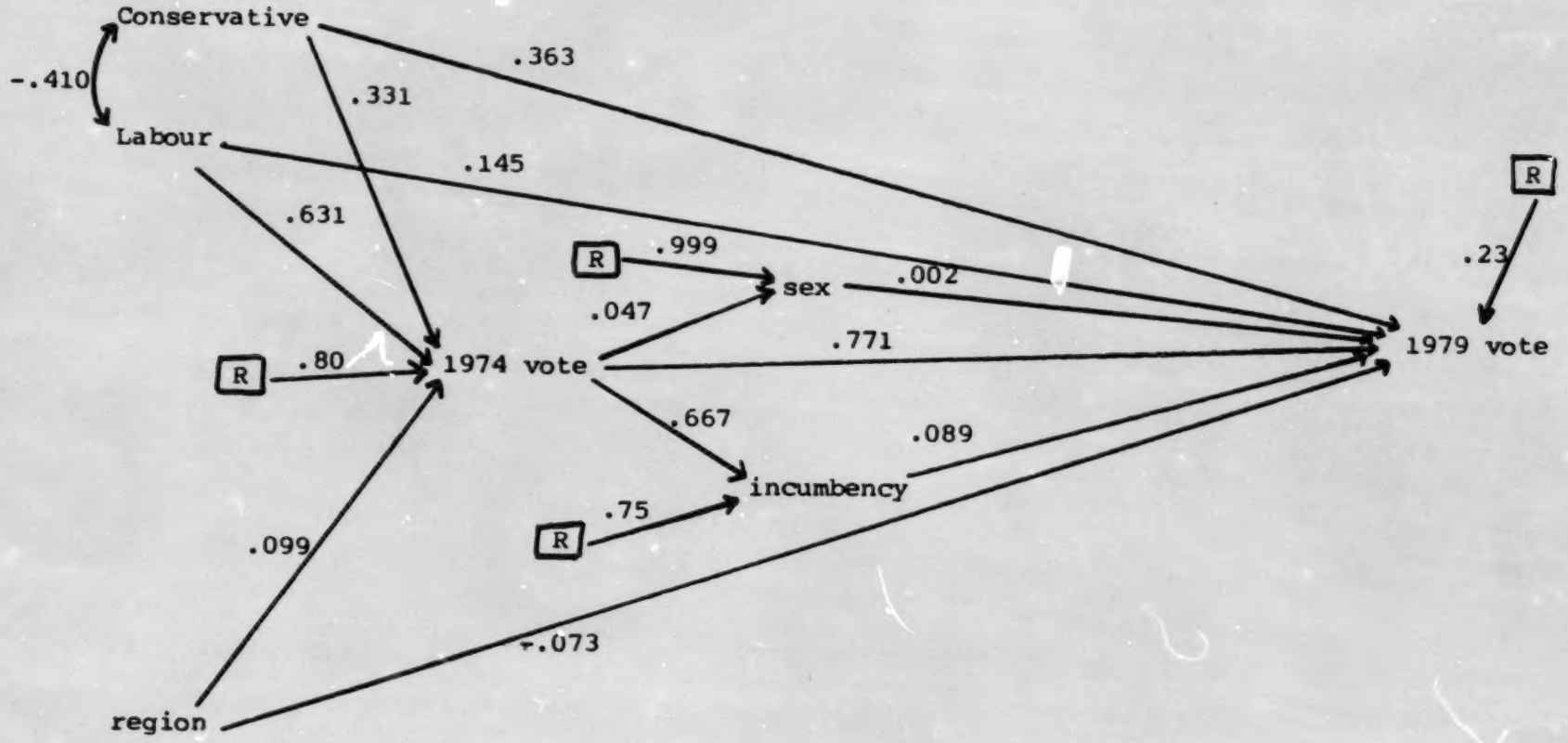
Conservative
-.410
Labour
.363
.331
.145
.631
R
.999
sex
.002
.047
.23
R
.771
1979 vote
R
.80
1974 vote
.667
.089
incumbency
R
.75
.099
-.073
region

Table 8

Actual and Estimated Correlations for Combined Candidates' Model

	Con	Lab	region	1974	incum	sex	1979
Con				.061			.358
Lab				.518			.409
region				.201			.078
1974	.073	.495	.099		.667	.047	.913
incum				.667			.641
sex				.047			.039
1979	.365	.407	.008	.920	.663	.046	

Table 9

Decomposition of Effects for Combined Candidates' Model

	direct	indirect	spurious	total
Conservative	.363	.002	----	.365
Labour	.145	.262	----	.407
region	-.073	.081	----	.008
1974 vote	.771	.059	.090	.920
incumbency	.089	----	.574	.663
sex	.002	----	.044	.046

discussion--gender had no significant impact upon electoral success in 1979.

Thus despite employing a variety of analytical techniques it was not possible to find evidence that women candidates in the 1979 British General Election were penalized by the electorate for being women. Equations and models that examined the sexes separately differed little and equations and models that combined both groups of candidates and specifically introduced gender as an independent variable found that it had little weight.

The results did indicate, however, that to a limited extent the electoral fortunes of women candidates were more closely bound to the past performance of their party in the constituency where they were standing than were the electoral forutnes of men. And that incumbency, while only of limited importance for male candidates, was even less of an aid to women's electoral fortunes. Thus the British electorate may treat women candidates slightly differently from the way that it treats men, but appears to be quite truthful in saying that it will not desert its normal party preference simply because its party has adopted a female candidate.

Had this study found evidence of prejudice against women candidates on the part of the British electorate, the results of this study would have seemed much more striking. The findings should not be dismissed, however, simply because they are not dramatic. Women clearly are not making political headway in Britain and the reasons for this need to be pinpointed if they are to be corrected. By examining the impact of gender compared to other factors having an important effect upon electoral behavior it has been possible to ascertain with greater certainty than before that the problem does not lie with the electorate.

The source of the problem is the local constituency party candidate

selection committees. If the electoral fortunes of women are tied more closely than are those of men to past party performance, then the only way to increase the proportion of women serving in the House of Commons is for them to be adopted in the more winnable seats. The clear implication of this study is that women are not being adopted for such seats. The situation is not that women fail to poll less well than men and thus lose seats when adopted for constitutencies where their party has been competitive. Past vote is a better predictor of future vote in the case of women candidates then in the case of men. Rather women candidates are being adopted for constitutencies where their party has not done particularly well in the past and they have great difficulty in breaking out of this unpromising situation for while the electorate does not penalize them, it certainly gives them no bonus and seems slightly less likely than it is in its normal limited fashion to be influenced by the candidate's personal qualities.

The other side of the coin is that if local selection committees did adopt women candidates more frequently, they would not find that the electorate had penalized them for doing so. Thus getting a larger representation for women in the House of Commons is not a matter of electoral partisan self-interest clashing with unrealistic ideals of equality, but simply a matter of will or desire. The local political elite can, by abandoning their social conservatism, greatly expand women's political role in Britain. And while such a conclusion may not be dramatic research results, it does have the virtue of coinciding with the findings of previous research which employed very different analytical methods.[34]

1. The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-75, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1976), 1:545. Melville Currell, Political Woman (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 47.
2. Market & Opinion Research International, British Public Opinion, General Election 1979, report for week 5, p. 17.
3. Sunday Telegraph, 26 March 1978, p. 1.
4. Especially are they likely to give an honest response about the role of women in politics when, as Robert McKenzie has pointed out, most field workers for survey firms are women.
5. David Butler and Dennis Kanavagh, The British General Election of 1979 (London: Macmillan, 1980).
6. Melville Currell, op. cit.; J. Hills, "Are Women Candidates a Bad Electoral Risk?" (unpublished paper); Jorgen Rasmussen, "Female Political Career Patterns & Leadership Disabilities in Britain: The Crucial Role of Gatekeepers in Regulating Entry to the Political Elite," Polity 13 (Summer, 1981), 600-20.
7. The actual number of women standing for the main parties in 1979 were Labour 52, Liberal 51, and Conservative 31.
8. This study is concerned with the role of gender among the main parties. Since minor parties are being ignored, there is no need to include female candidates from them. Excluding these women does not make the group included in this study a sample, rather than a population, because the conclusions are intended to apply only to the main parties.
9. Unfortunately, the effect of gender cannot be isolated entirely in 1979. Twenty-seven of the 104 women stood for the same constitutency in both October 1974 and 1979. In 13 cases although the woman candidate of 1979

had not stood in the previous election, another woman had stood for another party in that constituency in October 1974. Thus in only 64 cases where a woman stood in 1979 had there been no woman standing in October 1974. In the first two instances the impact of a woman on the electorate may have occurred already prior to 1979. These two types clearly involved different circumstances and thus cannot be analyzed together. Separately, however, they involve so few cases that analysis seems inadvisable. As for the third situation, while the number of cases probably is sufficient for analysis, focusing on it alone would limit the discussion to the impact of an entering woman candidate in 1979 rather than to the broader question of the role of gender in the 1979 election. Thus, although not entirely satisfactory, the procedure will be to consider the 104 women as a single group.

10. In almost all instances the constituency of the male candidate bordered on the constitutency of the female candidate. In a few instances, however, using a nearby, but non-adjoining constituency, was necessary to meet the selection criteria. This slight departure should not have compromised the objective of a matched sample; whatever local factors might have affected the electoral results achieved by the woman candidate are quite likely to have affected those of the male candidate as well.

11. Fourteen of the 104 women and 15 of the 104 men included in this study were incumbents at the time of the 1979 election. In order to get the best possible match between men and women according to share of vote for their party in the previous election, it was not always possible to match an incumbent woman with an incumbent man and still satisfy the other selection criteria for the male sample.

12. Butler and Kanavagh, op. cit., pp. 394-5.

13. North and south are defined the same way as in the Nuffield study, Butler and Kanavagh, op. cit., pp. 355, 395. The dividing line runs roughly from Merseyside to the Wash with Scotland being included with north England and Wales with south England.

14. For confidence limits and significance tests in multiple regression see Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Applied Regression: An Introduction (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), pp. 30-5.

15. The confidence interval for south comes within .04 of zero and thus, perhaps, should be regarded as being at the .05 percent level of confidence, which puts its upper limit .46 away from zero.

16. Again, south just barely meets this test and can with greater assurance be put at the .05 level.

17. The beta weight, a standardized regression coefficient, measures the amount of change in the dependent variable produced by a standardized change in the independent variable while the other variables in a regression equation are controlled, i.e., held constant statistically. While beta weights indicate the relative impact of variables in a single equation, they usually cannot be compared from one equation to another--one usually could not say that incumbency had twice the effect among male candidates as it did among female ones. In this study, however, a comparison across equations is permissible because the means and standard deviations of all the variables hardly differ from the one group of candidates to the other.

18. This finding coincides with evidence from another study that women MPs tend to be more vulnerable to defeat than are male MPs. Rasmussen, op. cit., pp. 609-10.

19. South has a negative slope because the bulk of candidates included in this study are Liberal or Labour. The swing was to the Conservatives, especially in the south. Thus the majority of southern candidates in this study would have done less well than the majority of northern candidates.

20. See Norman Nie, et al., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (2nd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), pp. 332-40.

21. The procedure requires calculating a series of regression equations, each one of which omits one of the independent variables. The R^2 for each of these equations is subtracted from the R^2 for an equation containing all the independent variables. The difference is the square of the part correlation for the variable omitted from that equation.

22. In the case of the two pairs, the variable which was entered first was the one having the highest partial correlation with the dependent variable at that point in the analysis. Thus strictly speaking the order of entry was Labour, Conservative, 1974 vote, south, and incumbent for the equation for women candidates and Labour, Conservative, 1974 vote, incumbent, and south for male candidates.

23. For purposes of the hierarchical decomposition sex was grouped with south and incumbent (cf. note 22). Its relation to the dependent variable was so limited that it entered the equation only after all the other variables.

24. Hubert Blalock, Jr., Social Statistics (2nd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 452. See also, Herbert Asher, Causal Modeling (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976), pp. 34-5.

25. Mark Franklin and Anthony Mughan, "The Decline of Class Voting in Britain: Problems of Analysis and Interpretation," American Political Science Review 72 (June, 1978), 523-34.

26. For a discussion of the procedures involved see Asher, op. cit. The coefficient on the link between Labour and Conservative is the zero-order correlation between them. The coefficients for the paths converging on 1974 vote are the beta weights obtained from regressing 1974 vote on Conservative, Labour, and region. The coefficient between 1974 vote and incumbency is the zero-order correlation between them. The coefficients on the paths converging on 1979 vote are the beta weights obtained from regressing 1979 vote upon Conservative, Labour, region, 1974 vote, and incumbency.

27. For a similar form of presentation see Allan Kornberg, Harold D. Clarke, and George L. Watson, "Toward a Model of Parliamentary Recruitment in Canada," in Allan Kornberg, ed., Legislatures in Comparative Perspective (New York: McKay, 1973), pp. 267-79.

28. Asher, op. cit., pp. 33-4.

29. The rules for tracing the paths are those of Wright, as set forth in Asher, op. cit., p. 33.

30. Asher, op cit., p. 34.

31. The situation was not that indirect effects were absent in the case of the Conservatives, but rather that the positive indirect effects were almost exactly offset by the negative indirect effects.

32. Jorgen Rasmussen, "The Role of Women in British Parliamentary Elections," Journal of Politics 39 (November, 1977), 1051.

33. Causal modeling can be performed with either beta weights or the unstandardized coefficients (b). Asher, op. cit., pp. 47-8 recommends using the unstandardized for comparisons across subsets of data and the standardized for analysis of the relative impact of variables within a data set. This recommendation need not be followed, however, for the reasons given in note 17 above.

34. Rasmussen, "Female Political Career Patterns...," op. cit.